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SUBJECT: JANUARY 20 MCNS DISCUSSES ASHURA SECURITY,
STRATEGIC WATER POLICY, AIRPORT SECURITY CONTRACT

REF: 2008 BAGHDAD 00126

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: The Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) met January 20 to review the readiness of the Ministry of Interior forces, Baghdad International Airport's security contract, fuel allocations/deliveries for border security forces, and the success of security measures for the Ashura festival. The largest amount of time was devoted to a presentation by the Minister of Water Resources (MWR) on the situation of Iraqi water resources and its strategic implications now and for the future. End Summary.

Ashura Security Measures

¶2. (C) The PM opened the meeting with a request for an assessment from the MOI on the security measures undertaken for the Ashura festival. MOI reported that the security measures had been implemented well with good coordination, arguing the greater the unity of security forces' efforts, the better for security. Commanding General (CG) David Petraeus praised MOI and MOD efforts, calling their coordination very good. CG also praised the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) actions in Basra and Nasariyah against extremist elements.

MOI Readiness

¶3. (S) Minister of Interior Bulani reported that MOI was on track to be fully-staffed and resourced before the end of the year. This forms a necessary part of the preparations for Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in all the provinces of the country by the end of 2008. There remains a shortage of vehicles - while 4,000 up-armored HMMWVs should be transferred from the Coalition Forces to the ISF in 2008, only in 2009 will the shortage be resolved with the transfer of a second tranche of 4,000 vehicles. National Security Advisor Rubaie asked if all local police had been issued weapons. Bulani responded that many vehicles and weapons were at the ports of Aqaba and Kuwait awaiting transport to Iraq. He noted that MOI now has 23 training centers, 17 more than last year. These centers were successfully preparing officers and re-training those who need it. Responding to Rubaie, Bulani asserted that Iraq would be self-reliant for internal security by the end of the year. (Note: after the meeting, General Petraeus told Rubaie that Bulani was being very optimistic and that the MOI and MOD forces are nowhere near self-sufficiency. End Note.)

Fuel for Border Security Forces

14. (S) A frank exchange took place on the allocation and delivery of fuel to MOI and MOD forces. The CG noted that the allocations for the MOI and MOD were less than half of their needs and even those allocations were not being delivered. The Deputy Minister of Oil argued that the current security situation dissuaded truckers from making deliveries. CG, joined by MOI and MOD, responded that perceptions of insecurity on the routes were several months out of date and are based on a situation of violence that has been overcome. CG also noted that with the income from oil sales, the Ministry of Oil could afford to purchase many times the number of trucks lost over six months ago. The Finance Minister asked why the refinery at Haditha was not operating. The Oil Ministry's response that it was unsafe to deliver crude from the terminal at Baiji to Haditha impressed no one - PM noted that tribal leaders in the area had agreed to provide security for truckers. MOD intervened that his forces would provide security for deliveries, noting they have been doing so for some time, but that the Oil Ministry must provide the transport and drivers.

Anbar Security Chief

15. (S) Ambassador Crocker raised issue of proposed dismissal of Anbar province Border Security Commander for the region in Anbar Province that includes the Ar Ar Crossing with Saudi Arabia. He noted that the Awakening Council, the Governor, the Police Commander, and the Provincial Council - a rare consensus - all opposed his removal from office. He counseled delay and discussion with the interested parties. The MOI responded that the commander in question, a Colonel Abdallah, would remain

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in office temporarily, but that he was not a trained officer and therefore his appointment had been irregular. He must be replaced, but Minister Bulani promised to consult with provincial leadership to find the right man to replace Colonel Abdallah.

Airport Security Contract

16. (S) Once the issue of delayed payments to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) contractor Global Security was finally raised, National Security Advisor Rubaie recommended putting off the issue until next week due to the absence of the Minister of Transportation. (Note: The GOI is once again in substantial arrears with security contractor Global RSL, who are threatening to suspend operations at the airport. This could lead to suspension of ICAO certification. Work by MNF-I on 21 January appears to have resulted in MinTransport signing payment authorizations to keep the contract in place and BIAP open to international air traffic. End Note.)

Strategic Water Policy

17. (C) The Minister of Water Resources, Abd al-Latif Rashid, presented an overview of the strategic value of water resources and steps that must be taken soon to address the problem that Iraq is likely to face in the future. He opened his remarks by noting that most of Iraq's water originates in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. Though relations with Turkey and Syria regarding water have been good, development projects in Turkey over the next decade could decrease the flow of water into Iraq from Turkey by 60 percent. He noted that discussions had taken place in Damascus with the Syrian and the Turks and they had reached agreement on coordination and cooperation, but this was not a binding international agreement. Iran has not been cooperative at all regarding water resource management,

diverting several rivers' courses so that waters do not flow into the Shatt Al Arab.

¶18. (C) Rashid also noted the importance to put in place modern irrigation and water conservation programs, maintain over 80 thousand kilometers of irrigation canals, clear weeds from rivers, streams, and drainage channels, and build reservoirs to store large amounts of water. Several rivers also need to be dredged, he added.

¶19. (C) Regarding the Mosul Dam, Iraq's largest and most important, he insisted that improvements to structure had already been made and the situation of the dam is no longer grave. That said, extensive repairs are still needed to realize the dam's full potential. (Note: as long as the Iraqis keep the reservoir pool at 319m or less, rather than the max height of water of 337m, and move forward with a long term plan to add a cut-off wall to reinforce the dam, the Mosul Dam will not likely fail. End Note.)

¶10. (C) Responding to Ambassador Crocker's question, Rashid said that work on the Nasariyah drainage project had been slowed by the transition from project management by the Washington Group to the MWR. CG noted that a recent Iraqi change in the project manager should lead to improvements in project implementation. He also noted that some of the current budget surplus could be used to hire unemployed young men to clear and repair parts of the irrigation system. Rashid expressed support for this plan, adding that MWR needs kelp-cutters and other equipment. Finance offered additional funding for the necessary equipment and suggested consulting with the Italians who have expertise in this work.

¶11. (C) Rashid suggested that the GOI should move towards formal agreements with its neighbors regarding water management. The MOI suggested that cooperation rests on good relations with the neighboring states, also, multi-lateral agreements will likely be needed. The Foreign Minister agreed that formal agreements on water flow and water quality will be needed but that it is not yet time to involve the larger international community. (Note: One of the MWR recommendations was to use pressure from the Arab League to increase cooperation from Turkey. End Note.) A consensus emerged that the GOI must continue to engage with Syria and Turkey regarding water resources and that formal legal agreements on water flow quality and quantity will likely be needed in the future.

¶12. (C) Rubaie praised the MWR presentation for reminding

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the MCNS of the importance of water, for agriculture, personal use, industry, and energy production, which makes its proper management a strategic security issue. Given that most of Iraq's water originates outside of the country, consultation and arrangements with neighbors will be a vital component of strategic water resource management.

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